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ABSTRACT

A practicum aimed to reduce overreliance on the basal reading program in grade 1 of the elementary school. It also endeavored to provide teachers with quality choices to enhance and enrich their reading/writing programs. Five workshops were designed to meet the specific needs of a public school district located on the northeastern seaboard which services 5,000 students. Goals of the practicum were to reduce the time spent on the tests accompanying the basal series, and to offer suggestions for successfully incorporating whole class reading activities and integrating the teaching of reading and writing. The practicum also sought to decrease the number of workbook and skillsheet pages used. Proven strategies were modeled for teachers during the workshops through video tapes and in demonstration lessons. In addition, the teachers were introduced to numerous professional journals, and were encouraged to join professional organizations. Results indicated that all of the teachers decreased the number of tests given and the corresponding amount of time spent on testing. Furthermore, time spent on specific skill instruction decreased while time spent on integrated, meaningful reading/writing activities increased. Results also indicated that teachers are willing to change when meaningful alternatives are modeled for them, and that time, patience, and a supportive environment are required for effective and longlasting change to occur. (Three tables of data are included; 31 references are attached.) (Author/PRA)

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Decreasing Overreliance On Basal Readers Through Staff Development

by

Deborah J. Evans

Cluster XXXVI

A Practicum I Report presented to the
Ed.D. Program in Early and Middle Childhood
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

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PRACTICUM APPROVAL SHEET

This practicum took place as described.

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This practicum report was submitted by Deborah J. Evans under the direction of the advisor listed below. It was submitted to the Ed.D. Program in Early and Middle Childhood and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova University.

Approved:

July 23, 1991
Date of Final Approval of Report

William W. Anderson, Ed.D.
Advisor

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ABSTRACT

Decreasing Overreliance on the Basal Reader Through Staff Development. Evans, Deborah, 1991: Practicum I Report, Nova University, Ed.D. Program in Early and Middle Childhood. Descriptors: Reading/Staff Development/Elementary Education/ Teaching/Instructional Practices/Administrators/Principals

This practicum aimed to reduce overreliance on the basal reading program in the elementary school. It also endeavored to provide teachers with quality choices to enhance and enrich their reading/writing programs.

Five workshops were designed to meet specific areas of need in this district. Reducing the time spent on the tests accompanying the basal series was the first goal. Then teachers were offered suggestions for successfully incorporating whole class reading activities and integrating the teaching of reading and writing. Decreasing the number of workbook and skillsheet pages used was another focus. Proven strategies were modeled for teachers during the workshops, through video tapes and in demonstration lessons. Numerous professional journals and books were introduced along with encouragement to join professional organizations. Data was collected before, during and after the workshop sessions.

Outcomes were very positive. Although teaching habits change slowly, all the goals of this practicum were achieved. All teachers decreased the number of tests given and the corresponding amount of time spent on testing. Time spent on specific skill instruction decreased while time spent on integrated, meaningful reading/writing activities increased. The data from this practicum strongly supported the following: (a) teachers are willing to change when meaningful alternatives are modeled for them, and (b) time, patience and a supportive environment are required for effective and longlasting change to occur.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Description of Work Setting and Community

This practicum problem-solving experience took place in a public school district that is located on the northeastern seaboard and services 5,000 students, mixed racially and ethnically. There are four kindergarten through grade five schools, one grade six school, a school for seventh and eighth graders and a high school. Each building has a principal and a fulltime assistant principal with the exception of the high school which has three assistants.

Within the last few years, the positions of Director of Reading, Math Coordinator, and Guidance Director have been abolished. The responsibilities formerly assumed by the three individuals have been assumed by the Assistant Superintendent in charge of the elementary schools.

One school was chosen as a pilot for this project. Approximately 50% of the students attending this school are black or Hispanic. The school personnel represent a variety of ethnic and racial backgrounds. The majority of staff members have been employed by the district for ten or more years.

The district has been concerned with improving test scores on the state mandated standardized tests. One result

of this was the adoption of a new basal reading series three years ago. Teachers are held strictly accountable for their students' scores and progress through the series. Promotion and retention policies are based on benchmarks in this basal series. In this particular school, sixteen of ninety-one were retained in grade one due to where they were working in the basal series.

As this project unfolded, changes in administration were occuring. Originally, the Assistant Superintendent of Schools was a man who was cooperative and supportive. He did not have a background in reading and inherited the reading responsibilities when the Director of Reading position was abolished. He also inherited many other responsibilities and was overextended. He decided to retire along with the Superintendent. Presently, building principals have been given the roles of Acting Superintendent and Acting Assistant Superintendent. The new Acting Superintendent was also very supportive of this "pilot project," as he referred to it. As a former elementary principal he was well aware of the inherent issues and ramifications.

The building principal was new. This was his first year as a building principal, having served within the district as an assistant principal for a number of years. He is student- centered and committed to helping children learn to read although he does not have a background in reading. His assistant principal was also new. She was a reading

specialist at another elementary school in the district prior to accepting this position. She is extremely knowledgeable about reading and works successfully with this building population. She is the driving force here. She is well respected by the Assistant Superintendent and by her building principal.

There are five first grade teachers. Most of them have at least ten years experience. Three have earned Master's degrees. Two of these are state certified reading specialists. The building reading specialist is an expert in dealing with children and solving reading problems.

Writer's Work Setting and Role

This writer has worked with this school district for the last five years as a consultant from the publishing company that provided them with their new basal series (and their older series). Over time, support services continued to be requested. These requests generally came from the Assistant Superintendent. Others came from building level reading specialists. Occasionally a principal called, but most often the requests were channeled through the Assistant Superintendent or the building reading specialists.

After three years, there continued to be many questions and concerns regarding pacing, what was core and what was optional as well as evaluation procedures. This presented quite a challenge since there were several very vocal and

extreme views on how reading should be taught and assessed. Ordinarily this might not be significant, however due to the large percentage of students who move from one elementary school to another within the school year, consistency became more important.

Another factor that is significant here was the power base. This writer was often asked what "the company" recommended. Nothing happens in this district without Central Office approval. All recommendations must be approved by the Assistant Superintendent of Schools before change can occur. Fortunately, trust and respect have been established. Therefore permission was granted for this "pilot." In essence, he allowed limited change to occur without mandating it across all the schools or seeking Board of Education approval.

Some steps were taken. Representatives from the publishing company sent professional literature to the school administrators. A summary booklet describing various uses of the series was sent to each administrator. Invitations were extended to meet with senior authors to discuss new forms of assessment and current strategies used to teach reading. A professional video tape series was made available to help in staff development. Inservice workshops were conducted by the publishing company's consultants a minimum of one to two times each year.

CHAPTER II

STUDY OF THE PROBLEM

Problem Descripion

The school district requires administration of the unit and end-of-book tests that are available with the series. Reading specialists keep a close watch on these scores and the district administration requires reteaching and retesting. Most first grade teachers do not continue with additional stories in the series until their students have met the passing criteria. Some reading specialists will not give the next book to the teacher until each child has passed the test. This has created tremendous problems, especially with Black and Hispanic children. In one particular case, a subtest tested inflected endings which many of these children do not hear. The group was not permitted to read any further until everyone passed that subtest.

The district requires students to complete certain portions of particular books by specific dates to be "on grade level." Retention and promotion are based almost exclusively on the work students do in this basal series. With this background, it is not surprising that the teachers spend almost all of their time focusing on specific skill objectives from the basal manuals. This has been documented

by administrators' classroom observations and planbook records.

Teachers express similar frustration. All first grade teachers reported spending 140 minutes each day on reading/language arts. Informal interviews indicated that they felt pressured to get their children to pass the tests. Three indicated that they just didn't have time for anything "fun."

The most unfortunate victims are the first grade children. When a first grade teacher recounted that some of the children cry during the unit and end-of-book tests it was evident that she was torn between doing what she felt was right and between what she thought she had to do. No first grade teacher wants to see children that upset, yet she did not feel she could make a change.

These first grade teachers report they are spending one month of their allotted reading time each school year on the reading tests that accompany the basal series. This is more than twice the amount of testing time recommended by the publisher. Teachers are currently assigning an average of six workbook or skill sheets each day. Their belief is that this will help prepare their students for success on the tests. This is consistent with their commitment to allocate 90% of their current instructional time to skill instruction. Not much time is left, and these teachers do not spend any of the remaining time involving students in whole class reading activities. Similarly, there were no

reports of class activities designed to promote the connections between reading and writing.

In summary, there is an overreliance and a misuse of the basal reading series in these first grade classes.

Problem Documentation

The loss of the Director of Reading was tragic for this district. She was able to work with the administrators, the teachers, the parents and the reading specialists. Even though there were philosophical disagreements regarding reading instruction, she was able to insure that no one was too extreme or rigid in their interpretation. She also provided a valuable professional consulting and mediating role. Since she left the district this problem developed.

The district retention policy was discussed earlier. This has an effect on the teachers as well as the students. Another district policy is the enforcement of completing very detailed reading skill cards. These are passed from one teacher to the next as evidence that a child can read. These cards require the administration of the basal tests to get the data for entry on the cards.

Informal discussions with the teachers indicate they are unsure of their choices or afraid of leaving something out. The building administrators report that the five lesson plan books show a focus on drill for skill mastery until students are able to meet the criterion score stated in the testing

manual provided by the publishing company. Almost all commercially available dittos and workbook pages are being assigned. On average this is six per day.

The five first grade teachers, the reading specialist, and the two building administrators agreed that basal testing is taking one full month of the school year at the first grade level. This is one-tenth of their potential instructional time spent on testing.

All five first grade teachers have at least three (one has four) permanent reading groups. The teachers reported that all reading activities were done in groups. No whole class activities are being conducted. Correspondingly, no conscious integration between reading and writing occurs. Despite the label reading/ language arts, the two are considered separately. Reading is basal reading groups and language arts is the language arts workbook.

Further admission of this problem came when the Assistant Superintendent called this writer requesting help from the publishing company with this problem. He specifically asked for meetings with the district administrators to explain how the program was intended to be used as well as to gain some insight regarding what could be done at the district and building levels to improve this situation.

Causative Analysis

There are a number of probable causes for this problem. Economics, politics, as well as educational considerations come into play. Certainly one cause is the lack of sound leadership and direction. Before the Director of Reading position was abolished, the district had their own professional liason. This reading professional helped to insure that sound practices were being followed and she was available to help in many ways. The current administrators do not have the expertise and have not chosen to invest the time to become knowledgeable in this area.

Looking at the larger picture, however, it is difficult to cast blame. Is it the Superintendent's fault for allowing the Board of Education to abolish the Director of Reading position? Is it the Board of Education's fault for not listening to the Superintendent's pleas for this position? Is it the tax payers fault because they did not want (or could not afford) to pay higher property taxes? The political arena is difficult to evaluate. What remains is a Superintendent forced into retirement, a Director of Reading without a job, and a school district lacking leadership in the area of reading.

Somewhere in the Central Administration some responsibility must be taken. If this change was going to occur, as it did, then some other steps should have been included to insure ongoing articulation between students,

teachers, administrators and parents. It is unfortunate that this problem was allowed to expand to its present magnitude without some previous intervention. Within every district, someone must be responsible for curriculum decisions.

Building principals and reading specialists do not feel able to make changes they feel are necessary. Teachers feel the same way. As long as they are responsible for their students' test scores they are reluctant to change very much. It is difficult to pinpoint, but somehow over time many teachers and administrators have come to believe that if the teachers do everything in their basal manuals there is a direct correlation to success on the California Achievement Tests. It would be too easy to say they as professionals should have taken control of this problem and acted out of professional conscience to correct it. In reality, many of these professionals feel paralyzed and powerless. Testing is a very powerful economic and political tool.

Relationship of the Problem to the Literature

Innumerable volumes have been and are currently being written regarding the misuse of basal readers. The entire whole language movement has grown out of dissatisfaction with basals. Evidence for and against basals exists. McCallum (1988) takes the "don't throw the basals out with the bath water" position. Roger Farr (1988) wrote "A Place

for Basal Readers Under the Whole Language Umbrella," taking a best of both worlds position, while Goodman (1988) and many others take a stronger whole language view, with very little emphasis on basal readers.

Goodman believes that the misuse and overreliance of basal texts is due to an ingrained belief Americans have that technology can solve human problems. "Basals are now so dominant that they have become the reading curriculum in nearly all schools" (Goodman, 1988, p.iv). He continues, "So strong is the trust in the basal technology that both teachers' and students' performance are judged by the basal manuals and their objective referenced tests." It is possible that this type of a belief contributes to the current problem.

In a 1979 teacher training text, Farr and Roser discuss basal reader use since the McGuffey reader era begun in the 1840's. The section "You Can Adapt the Basal Reader to Meet Individual Needs" (pp. 444-445) takes two full pages. It clearly describes various ways modifications can be made to insure meeting the needs of individual children. As in the manuals that accompany the basal series in use, there is no mention that the basal should be the only means of instruction or assessment. At the other extreme, a new text Pathways to Literacy (Sampson and Sampson, 1991) does not even mention basal readers or their possible inclusion in an early literacy program. Perhaps this was a response to the widespread misuse of these materials. As

the first text so accurately summarizes "Despite the dominance of basals,keep in mind that basals are a tool for you to use and not a prescription for all reading needs. It is your task to modify and adapt this tool to meet the needs of your children"(p.446). Somewhere along the line this message was lost or forgotten.

Dolores Durkin (1984) investigated what effect basal manual suggestions had on teacher behavior in the classroom. She found that most teachers assigned all the practice workbook and copymasters available. They often didn't teach the material because the students had "done so much with it" but they did choose to assign it. None of the teachers told the children why they were doing any of the work or helped to make connections for the students. When it came to actual instruction, such as a Directed Reading Thinking Activity, the teachers ignored the manual. The problem may not be the materials, but the application of them. (Bacharach and Alexander, 1986). Only half of the 31 classroom teachers observed used any of the basal's prereading questions, while none used the suggestions for building background. Duffy, Roehler and Putnam (1987) were similarly perplexed by the difference in what their graduate students had been taught and what they were doing in actual practice. They found that many instructional decisions were based on maintaining attention and completing tasks rather than on understanding. Teachers also expressed that they saw themselves as technicians who were to follow directions

rather than professionals who adapt materials to individual needs. The results of this study were not promising. After coaching teachers in making specific types of decisions, they did not see application despite the evidence that the teachers were more effective when they made their own decisions. They concluded by recommending policy changes, recruiting more independent- minded students into teacher education and encouraging practicing teachers to use their political power and to voice their desire to be critical decision makers.

Prince and Mançus (1987) also found that teachers did not use many elements of their teacher manuals. Enrichment activities, in particular, were likely to be overlooked. These activities were often at the end of the teacher materials for a given story. After taking an enrichment activity and moving it to precede instruction, students were able to answer 71% of the comprehension questions correctly. Those using the traditional format answered only 58% correctly. Beck, Omanson and McKeown (1982) conducted a similar study. Their work focused on the role of prior knowledge in comprehension and story content. They adapted a traditional basal lesson and found that the children using the altered materials recalled more and were able to answer more questions correctly. Blanton, Moorman and Wood (1986) advocate a model of direct instruction to "maximize the possibility that students learn from skills instruction, and, more importantly, can apply the skills in appropriate

contexts." The materials that these five first grade teachers are using are more current than those used in these studies. Building background, accessing prior knowledge and a direct instruction model are prominently displayed and modelled in the teacher editions. The problem here is that despite the best information at their fingertips, tradition prevails.

Becoming a Nation of Readers: The Report of the Commission on Reading (1985) makes a number of recommendations to teachers and administrators based on observed practice and need. Among these are the need to spend more time on comprehension instruction, less time for students to complete workbooks and skill sheets. Children should also spend more time reading independently and more time writing. Becoming a Nation of Readers also strongly supports having teachers read aloud each day and allowing time to discuss and respond to the reading. A smaller booklet Becoming a Nation of Readers: Implications for Teachers is a twenty page summary of practices teachers can implement immediately. Spiegel (1988) followed this report with "What's Wrong with Overreliance on Workbooks and Skill Sheets and What To Do About It". Her focus was on successful alternatives to worksheets and skill sheets. Activities for individual children, pairs and small groups require a change in classroom management style for many teachers. As previously discussed, these changes are often desired by teachers but are difficult to implement. One of

the recommendations of Becoming a Nation of Readers relates to continued professional development for teachers. This will be considered more comprehensively in Chapter IV.

CHAPTER III

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS

Goals and Expectations

One major goal was to decrease the percentage of time spent on the basal reading series' tests. Another goal was to shift the percentages of time spent on skills toward more time spent on real reading and reading/writing activities. A third goal was to include some whole class reading activities in addition to the present ability group instruction.

Performance Objectives

During the implementation period the first grade teachers were only required to use unit tests. The requirement for end-of-book tests was waived. No formal testing was required until children reached the end of the third preprimer. This was assessed by reviewing the test records and the school policy as communicated by the building principal.

By the twelfth week of implementation a decrease in workbook pages and work sheets assigned was expected to

occur. A mean decrease of two pages per child per day was expected. This was measured by comparing the mean number of pages currently being assigned (as noted in daily lesson plans) to the mean number of pages being utilized during the twelfth week of implementation.

A 20% reduction in time spent on skill instruction was expected to occur by the the twelfth week of implementation. By administrative records of classroom observations and accounts reported in the plan books, teachers were spending 90% of the instructional class time on skill instruction. It was expected that this would be reduced to a mean of 70% using the same standard of measure in the twelfth week of implementation.

By the end of the implementation period, it was expected that each teacher would report using a whole class reading activity at least three times per week during the final eight weeks of the implementation period. This was measured through a structured interview in the final week of implementation.

At the end of the implementation period it was expected that teachers would increase their use of reading/writing activities to at least one per week. Prior to this iintervention no such activities had been observed. This was assessed by the building administrator report of a review of daily lesson plan books, classroom observations and teacher reports.

Measurement of Objectives

Objectives were measured in a variety of ways. Verbal and /or written policy change presented by the building principal or the Assistant Superintendent of Schools demonstrated that a change in testing policy had occurred. Counting the number of pages assigned daily was accurately quantified through lesson plan books and classroom observation. The same method was utilized to determine the degree of reduction in skill emphasis. A structured interview with each teacher during the last week of implementation revealed the extent to which whole class activities had been added. Integration of reading/writing was assessed in the same manner. As another source of measurement, the building principal, assistant principal and reading specialist kept records of changes they observed.

Mechanism for Recording Unexpected Events

This writer kept a journal related to this practicum. Any unforeseen events were recorded. It was comforting to know a phone call to the practicum advisor and Director of Practicums could be placed if necessary. Flexibility was built into the practicum and change was anticipated.

Description of Plans for Analyzing Results

Comparisons were made between the state of instructional practice and the state of affairs after the implementation period. Tables are included in chapter V which depict the changes. The performance objectives and the discussion of their measurement indicate the current status. Mean differences are analyzed, reported and discussed in Chapter V. Specific tables reflect basal reading tests used, skill workbook and worksheet pages assigned, and percentage of time spent on skill instruction. A narrative is used to describe the status of whole class instruction and the integration of reading/writing in the classroom. Numbers of reported activites are cited.

CHAPTER IV

SOLUTION STRATEGY

Discussion and Evaluation of Possible Solutions

The problem addressed here is the overreliance on the basal reading series by the first grade teachers in this setting. Many researchers and reading professionals have encountered similar problems. Chapter II described some of their problems briefly. This chapter will look at some of the possible solutions. Singer and Bean (1988) describe an intern model where committed teachers were trained to teach specific reading skills. They wanted to capitalize on the rapport these teachers already had established with their colleagues rather than to introduce an outside consultant. Another model Singer and Bean (1988) utilized was the inservice model. This model utilized a group of reading specialists, teachers, and administrators who worked together over several years. They set goals, were paid for two weeks in the summer to receive special training and were then given release time throughout the next school year to follow through with their project. A third model Singer and Bean (1988) studied was the evolutionary model. This consisted of training one teacher in the new strategies which he used with his class. His students acted as ambassadors spreading the word to other teachers who then came to him to learn his techniques.

Guiding the reading of basal stories by insuring a focus on comprehension and fluent, expressive reading was recommended in a study by Hoffman (1987). This procedure was developed and validated through the use of students in low- ability groups and utilized oral reading.

Five common elements of success with literature-based reading instruction have been identified by Zarrillo (1989). They are 1. the presentation of literature 2. children's response to literature 3. individualized time 4. teacher-directed lessons and 5. projects. Others have written articles and conducted studies with similar findings. Mary Ann Gray (1986) recommends the use of creative dramatics to stimulate better reading comprehension. Choral reading, shared reading and the use of predictable books have been endorsed by Heald-Taylor (1987), Trachtenburg and Ferruggia (1989) and Bridge (1989) as well as many others.

The benefits of reading aloud each day were discussed in Becoming a Nation of Readers (Anderson, et al., 1985). Hough, Nurss and Enright (1986) recommend specific strategies to use with story reading. Their strategies were tested on limited English speaking children in the regular classroom with encouraging results. This could be relevant to the present problem because a number of these students have similar backgrounds. Along a similar line, Franklin (1988) had students illustrate parts of stories read aloud in class. Dictating responses and writing their own narratives, Franklin found that children were able to create

and express their own personal meaning. Roser and Wilson (1986) provide an annotated bibliography for those teachers beginning to introduce children to the wonders of books as they are used in real life.

Spiegel's work, mentioned in Chapter II focused on the alternative approaches available to teachers when they want to move away from workbooks and worksheets. Martinez and Nash (1991) advocate "seatwork alternatives through literature" (p. 140). They admit that their suggestions "rarely replace" (p. 140) worksheets as seatwork but they provide strong documentation in support of this concept. Often teachers postpone integrating the language arts due to the complexity of change. That was the case at three schools in Berkeley, California during the 1983-84 school year. Buckley (1986) reported their process which included limiting the basal use to three days per week. Many how- to type books have been written in an effort to support teachers in transition. Literacy through Literature by Johnson and Louis (1987) is one that gives careful attention to all the details a teacher would need to be aware of in moving toward a literature approach.

The Struggle for Control of Literacy Lessons by Shannon (1989) expands the scope of this problem. His focus here is on the social- political arena. Who is in charge? is the question posed. At some level this must be addressed, but the issue is too complex to be tackled in this time frame.

Goodman, Shannon, Freeman and Murphy (1988) are among

those who would endorse getting rid of the basal readers and approaching reading from another angle. Many teachers do teach reading through trade books and other materials, without the support of a basal system. What's Whole in Whole Language? (1986) is a short synopsis of the whole language philosophy and Goodman's interpretation of how it can be implemented.

The authors of this particular basal series, Cullinan, Farr, Hammond, and Strickland more modestly propose teaching the teachers how to effectively use the basal as a tool in combination with trade books and shared reading experiences. Jensen and Roser (1987) endorse a similar position. They advocate the use of the basal as an optional tool in the classroom of a teacher " who knows children and language, teaching and learning."

The above insight came directly from the work of other professionals and researchers. There are several other options to consider based on experience in similar situations. One option is to discontinue the administration of the California Achievement Tests in first and possibly second grade. Scores for these grades are not required to be submitted to the State or reported on the annual District Report Card to the public.

District or building policy could limit the use of worksheets. Some administrators and teachers in other areas have chosen not to order workbooks and to use that money for trade books instead. These decisions can be made

cooperatively or they can be mandated.

The district could hire an outside consultant to give them impartial advice. The district would then, most likely, be encouraged to pay an outside consultant group to provide staff development services.

The role of the building reading specialists could be changed dramatically. They could become instructional leaders; advocates of holistic assessment. They could model and promote more interactive, literature-based strategies within and beyond the basals.

Given the magnitude of this problem and those it affects, it seems necessary to include several strategies. Staff development has been requested and there is a well-documented need for it. There is also a need for some new policy decisions at the administrative level. In the solution strategy it is very important to choose important, easily identifiable changes. The research of others has documented the difficulty in creating lasting change. That makes it even more important to choose areas where success is likely to occur. In this case, it is equally important to target something that can be accomplished in this time frame. It is easier to build new success on a foundation of success. This is one of the goals for this solution.

Description and Justification for Solution Selected

The first phase of this solution strategy was aimed at the administrative decision makers. The goal was to reduce the number of basal tests they require in grade one. The goal was to discontinue end-of-book testing and all testing prior to the end of the third preprimer. This could be accomplished through meeting with the administrators and providing them with information. Once they were aware of the misuse and ways to correct it, change was probable.

The next step was to address the teacher issues. This writer was prepared to meet with the Assistant Superintendent, the building principal and assistant principal,and the building reading specialist to set up a plan of action. It needed to include meeting with the first grade teachers to help them overcome some of their perceived obstacles. Time had to be set aside for these meetings and what was advocated had to be endorsed by the administration to have any lasting effect.

This proposal would be effective if everyone could see how it could be beneficial without creating extra work. Everyone was frustrated and in need of some type of change. Often an outsider can help in ways that capable educators in the system cannot. This writer's services were requested by the district which was a sign of confidence, recognition of the problem and a desire for something to change.

After the initial planning meeting occured, a schedule

of meetings with the first grade teachers had to be set up. The first meeting with the first grade teachers consisted of discussion, an overview of the philosophy and intended use of their basal series and identifying their needs. It was important for the teachers to trust this writer and to feel there was a commitment to them. They were also given a toll-free telephone number they could use to contact the consultant between workshops.

Because of the strong support at the administrative level and their interest in making change at the first grade level, this target was chosen. In an effort to meet the performance objectives, the meetings with the first grade teachers focused on assessment, alternative ways to incorporate the use and practice of skills in reading, choral and shared reading as a strategy for oral language and vocabulary development while providing a means of enjoyment for all children. Finally some strategies for integrating reading/writing were demonstrated. Naturally, some flexibility was required.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND DISSEMINATION

Results

The problem that existed was the overreliance on the basal reading series. Many factors contributed to this problem. The most compelling contributor was probably the lack of leadership in reading instruction at the district level.

The solution to this problem was to provide staff development for the teachers, enabling them to vary their instructional choices for their students. Each teacher participated in five inservice workshops, had access to classroom visitations and demonstration lessons by a trained consultant along with some shared planning time. Additionally, support was provided for the district administrators so they would be knowledgeable about appropriate practices in reading/writing instruction.

Three goals for this practicum were set. The first goal was to decrease the percentage of time spent on the basal reading series' tests. The second goal was to shift the percentages of time spent on skills toward more time spent on real reading and reading/writing activities. The third goal was to have teachers include some whole class reading activities in addition to, or instead of the ability-grouped instruction being used at the time. It was hoped that the teachers would become excited about some of the

choices for a richer, literature-based classroom and choose to pursue some of these avenues on their own.

Five specific objectives were set to achieve the goals. The teachers involved did not know what this writer's objectives were, other than to help them improve their reading program. Here are the objectives and the corresponding results:

Objective 1: During the implementation period the requirement of administering the end-of-the-book tests and the unit tests was waived. The unit tests, alone, were required. Table 1 shows the results of this objective as compared to the prior year when both were required.

Table 1.

Comparison of Teacher Use of Basal Reading Tests in First Grade*

	Number of Teachers-5		
	End-of-book and Unit Tests	Unit Only	No Formal Testing of Preprimers
1989/1990	5	0	5
1990/1991	0	5	0

*Comparison of three month period from March through May.

Objective 2: A mean decrease of two workbook pages per day per student was expected during this period. Table 2 shows the results of this intervention period (March through May as compared to a similar time period prior to this practicum implementation (December through February).

Table 2.

Comparison of the Mean Number of Workbook Pages Assigned Daily

	Before	After	Decrease
Pages	6	4.8	1.2

Objective 3: During the implementation, it was expected that teachers would reduce the amount of time they spent on skill instruction by 20%. Table 3 shows the before and after changes in amount of skill instruction time.

Table 3.

Comparison of Time Spent on Daily Skill Instruction

	Before	After	Precentage Decrease
Minutes	126	84.4	33%

Objective 4: It was expected that each teacher would report using whole class reading activities at least three times per week during the final eight weeks of the implementation period. Each of the five first grade teachers reported daily read alouds during the implementation period. Three of the five teachers reported additional activities involving their whole classes. The specific numbers averaged once per week over the last three weeks of the implementation period. This data was supported by a review of plan books and observation.

Objective 5: By the end of the implementation period it was expected that teachers would increase their use of reading/writing activities to at least one per week. All five teachers were observed to have included one or more reading/writing activities each week during the last two weeks of the implementation period. Each teacher also commented on the inclusion of these activities in the final structured interview.

Discussion and Conclusions

Qualitative and quantitative evidence was examined in determining the effectiveness of this practicum. Five first grade teachers were involved in this practicum. The reading specialist and assistant principal also played key roles.

Table 1 showed that the teachers did not choose to use the basal reading series' tests once they were not required by the administration. No one administered a basal test

they were not required to administer. Therefore, objective one was satisfied. This reduction in testing has now become a building policy.

Although Table 2 depicts a reduction of the number of workbook pages assigned daily, the reduction of 1.2 pages per day is not significant enough to meet objective two which was a reduction of two pages per day. Additional workshops have been requested by the first grade teachers to support their interest in alternatives to worksheets.

A 33% reduction in time spent on skill instruction is revealed in Table 3. The teachers had formerly spent an average of 126 minutes a day on skill work. At the end of this implementation period they were spending an average of 84.4 minutes per day on skills. Progress is occurring, but this is still out of proportion with sound practice.

All teachers reported daily read alouds. This is evidence of whole class activity. However, the intent of this objective was to encourage teachers to teach some lessons to the class as a group and reduce the amount of time spent in ability-grouped instruction. Due to the changes necessary in scheduling the workshops, there was not enough time for the teachers to successfully implement this over eight weeks. They were interested and responsive to the ideas. One whole class activity was observed for each teacher over the last three weeks of this implementation period. This is an area the teachers have chosen to pursue in the upcoming school year. Interest and desire to

eliminate ability grouping has spread throughout this group.

Each teacher did begin to integrate reading and writing within her classroom. The objective was met at a minimal level. The reward here is in the demonstrated willingness to change and the motivation to continue these changes on their own in the next school year. Everyone expressed an interest in continuing to explore the integration of reading and writing, the use of more literature in the classroom, the importance of a large block of uninterrupted time to do this each day, the reduction in emphasis on testing, and the willingness to investigate eliminating ability groups.

A review of the data shows that all objectives were not met at the levels initially proposed. Significant improvements did occur for each objective. The results support this writer's conclusion that staff development can help decrease overreliance on a basal reading program. This writer concludes that this intervention was successful, even if only a step in the right direction.

Recommendations

1. It is recommended that this staff development program be continued and expanded to include other teachers in the building.
2. It is recommended that the district discontinue the practice of standardized testing in grade one.
3. It is recommended that the teachers involved visit other teachers in other districts and attend professional

conferences that support their efforts. A networking system would be beneficial in their development.

4. It is recommended that the district reduce the amount of testing and reporting it requires at this time.

5. It is recommended that the school purchase children's books with the money they save by not purchasing the basal tests.

6. It is recommended that a certified children's librarian be available to support the teachers' efforts.

Dissemination

The results of this practicum have been made available to the school administrators and teachers who participated. It has also been shared with this writer's consultant colleagues who may encounter a similar situation. Plans are underway to present these results at several reading council meetings. A brief version, in journal article form for administrators is also in preparation.

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